

## **Public Health History – Air Quality Control**

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There are many things we take for granted in the Ozarks – the sunrise each morning, starry skies at night and fresh air to breathe each day. But keeping our air clean has been a hard-fought battle for many years.

Air pollution was once thought of a necessary evil a community must endure if it wanted to grow. But as the air quality in large cities began to dramatically deteriorate, the American public changed its mind. People began to move away from areas with unclean air and began to speak out against air pollution. They expressed their concern in demonstrations on Earth Day 1970. And it was the Clean Air Act of 1970 following those demonstrations that many people say was a key turning point for environmental protection.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 sought to correct problems with earlier strategies that had failed. It recognized that air pollution does not stop at clearly defined jurisdictional or state boundaries and that to combat air contamination, we must have a national strategy. The Act established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public health and New Source Performance Standards (NSPS) that tightly regulated emissions from new sources entering an area. It also established standards for hazardous emissions and emissions from vehicles. Finally, it gave citizens the right to take legal action against anyone who violated emission standards.

Since that time, new legislation continues to work to improve air quality, in part by raising automobile emission standards and tightening controls. Technology changes are allowing experts to monitor air quality better and more frequently, with smaller equipment that requires less maintenance. And education programs are encouraging the public to stay involved in keeping air clean in their communities.

Each one of us has a responsibility to do our part to keep air clean. Carpool, walk or bicycle to work. Take the bus. Combine trips. Drive less often. Keep vehicles tuned up. Buy gas during cooler parts of the day and don't top off the tank.

The Ozarks is growing. Unlike the attitude of long ago, we can't accept air pollution as a "necessary evil" that comes with growth. Let's work together to keep Ozarks air clean!

For more information on air quality control, contact the Springfield-Greene County Health Department.